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AUTHOR Weber, Laine
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ABSTRACT

This lesson explores the life of Adeline Hornbek, a single mother of four who became a successful homesteader in Colorado by taking advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862, which allowed unmarried, widowed, or divorced women to claim land as head of a household. The lesson can be used for teaching about the Homestead Act, the western expansion, or units on women's history. The lesson is divided into the following teaching sections: (1) "Setting the Stage: Historical Context"; (2) "Locating the Site: Maps" (Florissant, Colorado and Surrounding Region, 1891; Hornbek Homestead; and Homestead Plots in the Florissant Region); (3) "Determining the Facts: Readings" (The Story of Adeline Hornbek; The Proper Victorian Lady; and Homestead Proof: Testimony of Claimant); (4) "Visual Evidence: Images," (Hornbek Homestead; A Representative Barn); and (5) "Putting It All Together: Activities" (Homesteading; Homesteading in the Local Region; and Researching Important Women). (BT)

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Teaching with Historic Places

Adeline Hornbek and the Homestead Act: A Colorado Success Story

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March 10, 1999

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Adeline Hornbek
and the
Homestead Act: A Colorado Success Story

Colorado's Florissant Valley lies 35 miles west of Colorado Springs on the flanks of Pikes Peak. To the north and east, the Rocky Mountains dominate the skyline. To the west lies high meadow land with large expanses of undulating native grasses so beautiful that early fur trappers to the area referred to it as a park. In the summer the grassy meadows are filled with the colored mists of thousands of wild flowers. In the center of this lush valley stands the Hornbek homestead complex, the home of a strong, determined woman who came to the area with her four children in the 1870s. Claiming land under the Homestead Act, Adeline Hornbek defied traditional gender roles to become the owner of a prosperous ranch.

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3. **Researching Important Women**

About This Lesson

In this lesson, students study the life of Adeline Hornbek, a single mother of four who became a successful homesteader in Colorado. It is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file "Hornbek House" and historical documents compiled by staff at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. The lesson was written by Laine Weber, former Park Ranger at Florissant Fossil Bends National Monument.

Where it fits into the curriculum

Topics: This lesson could be used in teaching units on the Homestead Act and western expansion or units on women's history.

Time period: 1860s-1905

Objectives for students

1) To determine how the Homestead Act impacted the economic opportunities of some women.

2) To compare general perceptions of homesteading life with the life of female homesteader Adeline Hornbek.

3) To examine the socially perceived standards for women of the Victorian Era and describe how those norms differed from the realities of Hornbek's daily life.

4) To determine if the Homestead Act impacted the development of their community or region.

5) To investigate the role of important women in their own community's history.

Materials for students

The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students. The maps, photos, floor plan, and Testimony of Claimant appear twice: in a low-resolution version with associated questions and alone in a larger, high-resolution version.

1) three maps of Florissant, Colorado and surrounding region;

2) two readings about Adeline Hornbek and women in the Victorian Era;

3) a copy of Hornbek's Testimony of Claimant;

4) two photos of the Hornbek Homestead;

5) a floor plan of the Hornbek house.

Visiting the Site

The Hornbek Homestead is included within the boundaries of Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, which was created in 1969 to protect and interpret plant and insect fossils dating from 35 million years ago. The monument is located approximately 30 miles west of Colorado Springs and is accessible from Highway 24. For further information contact the Superintendent, Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument, P.O. Box 185, Florissant, Colorado, 80816 or call (719) 748-3253. For more information, visit the park web pages at http://www.nps.gov/flfo/

Teaching Activities

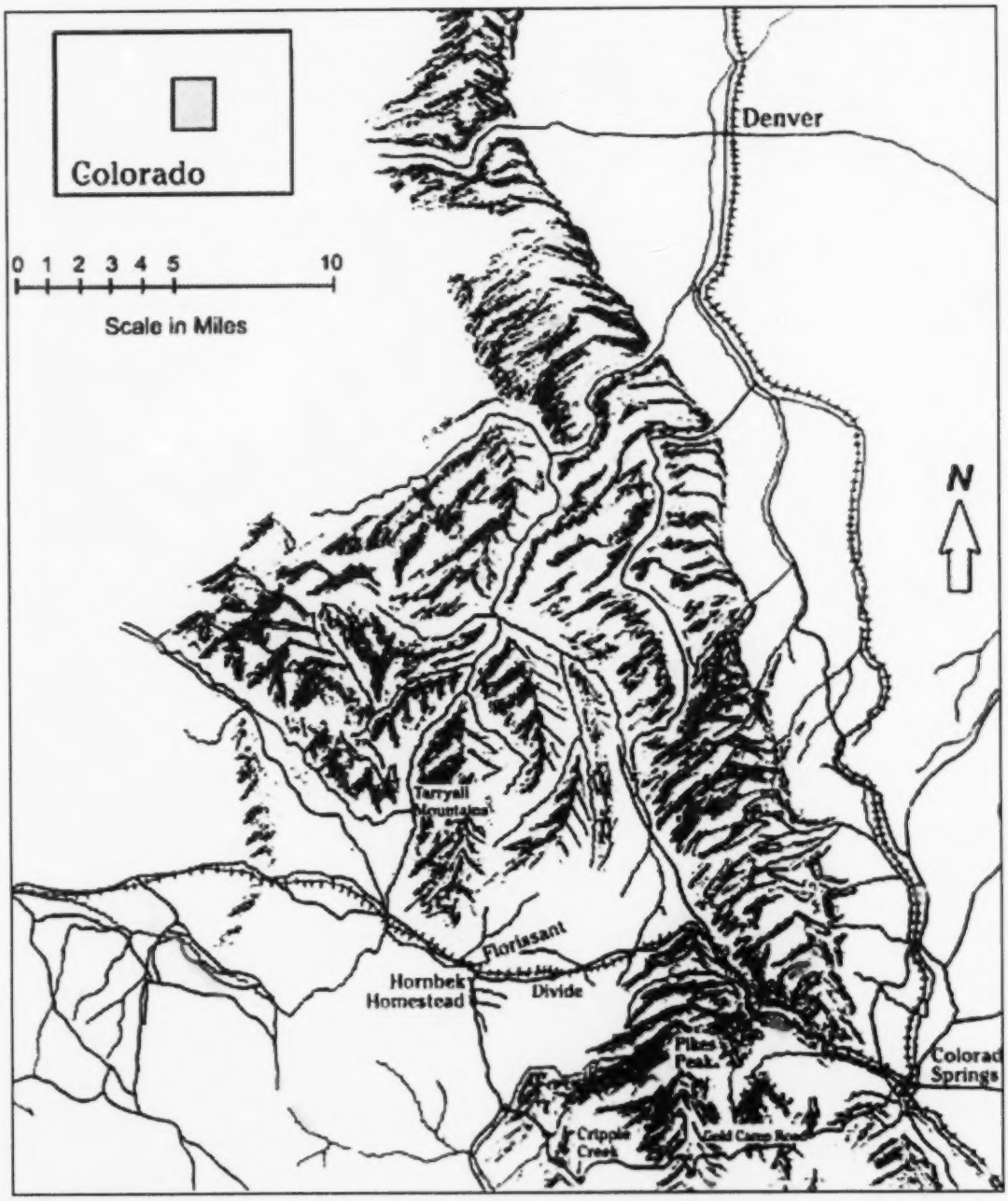
Setting the Stage

Explain to students that the Homestead Act of 1862 was passed to ease overcrowding in the East and help small farmers and would-be farmers by providing inexpensive land. The law stated that a U.S. citizen (or a person intending to become one) who was the head of a family and over 21 years of age could qualify for a land grant of 160 acres (one quarter square mile). To receive the land, applicants had to pay a $10.00 registration fee, live on the site for at least 6 months of every year for five years, and cultivate and improve the land for five full years. Settlers could purchase the land outright after only six months of residence at a cost of $1.25 per acre. By 1900, nearly 400,000 individuals or families had filed for land under the provisions of the Act.

Before the passage of the Homestead Act, it was nearly impossible for middle or lower class women to acquire land. They had few opportunities for employment and consequently little ability to accumulate the money necessary for buying land. Under the Homestead Act, however, unmarried, widowed or divorced women could claim homestead land as head of a household. By making land affordable the Homestead Act gave some women, like Adeline Hornbek, the chance to gain financial independence. A single mother of four, Adeline Hornbek defied traditional gender roles to become the owner of a prosperous ranch in Colorado's Florissant Valley.

Teaching Activities--Locating the Site

Map 1: Florissant, Colorado and Surrounding Region, 1891.



(Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Drawn by John Piveral.)

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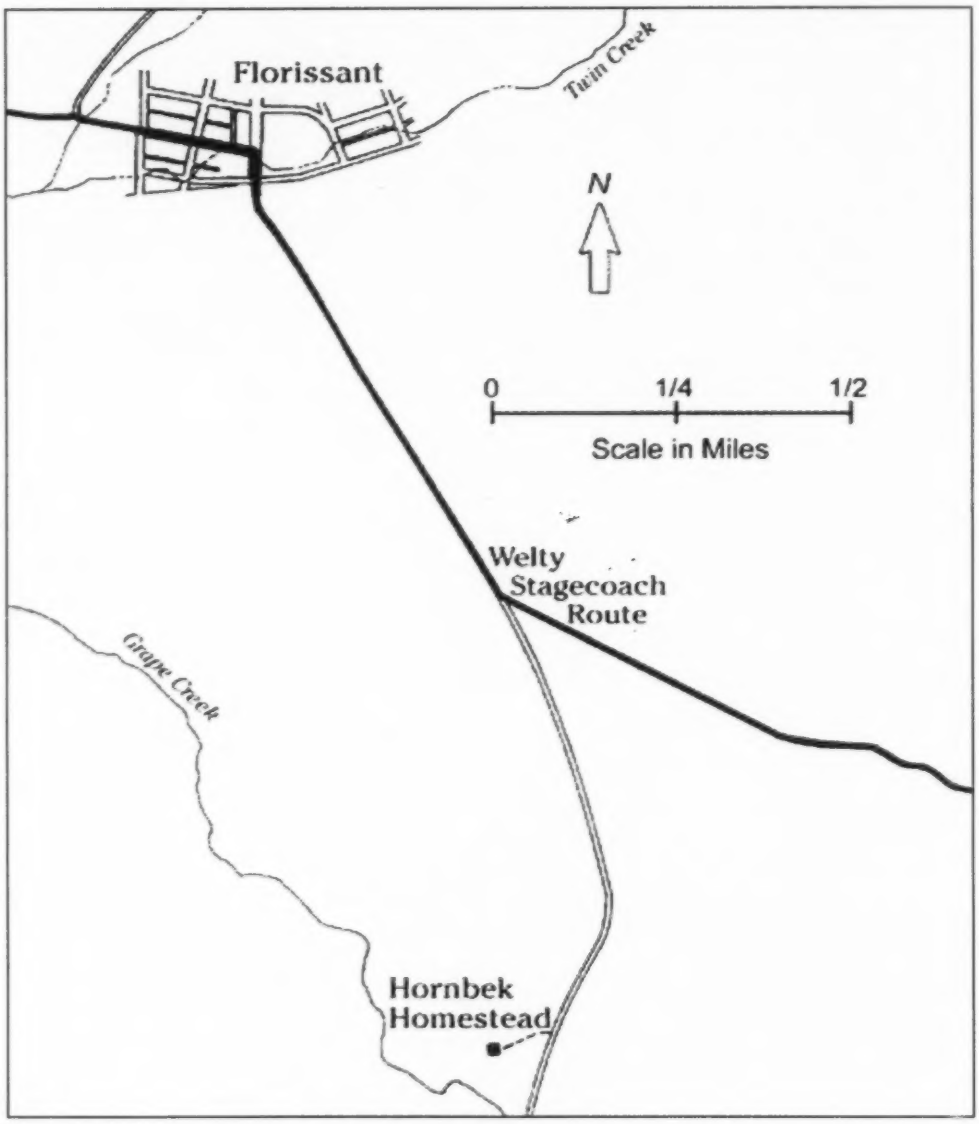
Colorado's Florissant Valley, where Adeline Hornbek claimed her homestead land, lies 35 miles west of Colorado Springs. The town of Florissant grew up in the early 1870s from a small ranch located along the old Ute Trail. The owner of the ranch used this location to expand his home into a small trading post, general store, and stopping place for overnight travelers and tourists. American Indians, mountain men, prospectors, and settlers used the Ute Trail. It followed a natural passage around Pikes Peak and provided a route for freight wagons, stagecoaches, and eventually the Colorado Midland Railroad from the more settled eastern plains into the Rocky Mountains.

1. Locate Denver, Colorado Springs, and Florissant.

2. Identify the major geographical features in the area. How would the topography of the area affect transportation routes? What transportation means would have been available in the region in the 1890s?

Teaching Activities--Locating the Site

Map 2: The Hornbek Homestead and surrounding area.



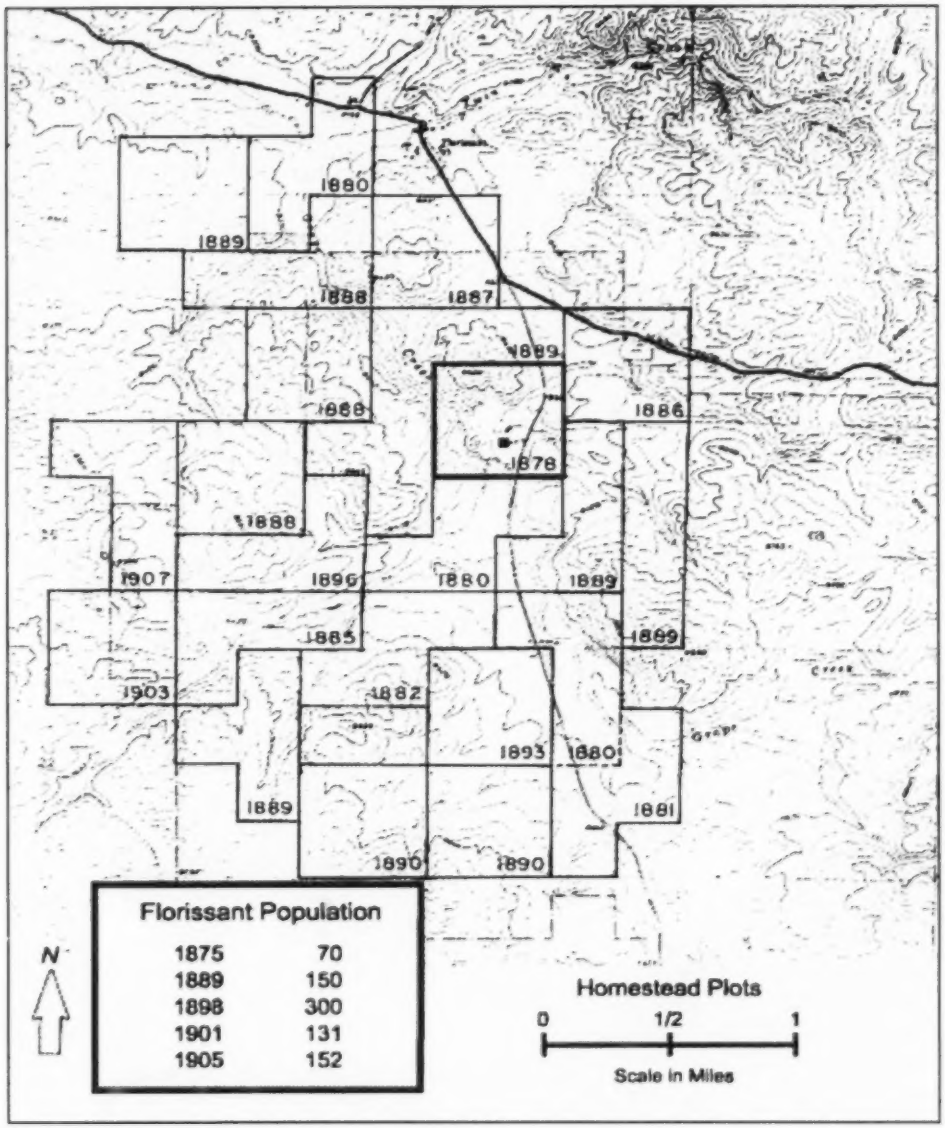
(Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Drawn by John Piveral.)

1. Use the map scale to determine the distance between Adeline Hornbek's homestead and the road, the stagecoach route, and the town of Florissant.

2. Why might it have been important for Hornbek's ranch to be near each of these?

Teaching Activities--Locating the Site

Map 3: Homestead Plots in the Florissant region.



(Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.)

1. Use the map scale and a compass to determine a one-mile and a two-mile radius from Hornbek's home (shown as a black square). How many neighbors did Hornbek have within a one mile radius in 1878? 1880? 1889?

2. Do you think Hornbek led an isolated life? Why or why not?

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Teaching Activities--Determining the Facts

Reading 1: The Story of Adeline Hornbek

Adeline Warfield was born in 1833 in Massachusetts. At the age of 25 she married Simon A. Harker, her brother's well-to-do business partner. Harker worked as an Indian trader and merchant in the Creek Territory in what is now part of the state of Oklahoma. In 1860 he developed a lingering illness. In the summer of 1861, the couple left the Creek Agency with their two young children and traveled by wagon to the Colorado Territory, an area known for its healthful climate.

The Harkers settled along the South Platte River, just northeast of the new mining supply town of Denver, where they farmed and raised cattle. In1863, the year their third child was born, Simon Harker filed a claim under the Homestead Act on 160 acres of land on which the family was living. When Harker died in 1864, Adeline faced life as a widow with three young children. Despite her difficult circumstances, it appears that she managed well by earning money from her crops and livestock. Foodstuffs sold for high prices in Denver because most of the supplies needed by gold miners in the area had to be brought to the territory by wagon train. Nearby farmers could sell their produce for lower prices than the wagon train traders and still make a sizeable profit.

By July 1866, Adeline Hornbek was able to exercise the clause in the Homestead Act that allowed early purchase of a homestead. She bought 80 of those acres for $100 in cash. Two months after she acquired ownership of the property, she married Elliott Hornbek, and in 1870, the couple had a son. Then, in 1875, Elliott Hornbek disappeared. There is an air of mystery surrounding him: his occupation, his reasons for leaving his family, and his ultimate fate are unknown. Once again Adeline Hornbek became the sole support for her family.

Hornbek left her Denver homestead after her husband's disappearance, but there is no record of why and no certain knowledge of where she spent the next three years. By early spring of 1878, she had accumulated enough money to build a ranch for her family in Colorado's Florissant Valley, a region that was becoming important as a supply center for gold and silver miners in the nearby mountains. Proximity to good transportation may have been an important factor in Hornbek's choice of this land because she knew it would be helpful for shipping out her agricultural products and bringing in goods she could not get locally.

The area Hornbek chose to settle lies along a tributary of the South Platte River. The immediate area offered an abundant water supply, fertile soil, large meadows for grazing cattle, and forests of Ponderosa pine. Dozens of these pines were cut and seasoned, and then built into a fine home by the master craftsman Hornbek hired. Aside from the main house, Hornbek's homestead consisted of several outbuildings including a milk house, chicken house, and stables. Her improvements created an impressive house and ranch. Her teenage children undoubtedly helped with the hard work the homestead required.

Adeline Hornbek's homestead house is not the typical one-room cabin that most of us envision when conjuring up a picture of homestead life. Instead, it is a two-story, four-bedroom log house boasting nearly a dozen glass-paned windows. When completed in 1878, the house was the first in the valley to have more than one story. The interior was decorated with ornate Victorian style furnishings. Furnishing a homestead house in a fancy style was typical. Many settlers brought small organs, rugs, pictures, and perhaps a few pieces of good furniture to their frontier homes even when their "house" might have been nothing more than a small sod shanty.

Like many homesteaders, Hornbek needed a cash income. She found work in town at the Florissant Mercantile (the general store). It was one of the few jobs, other than teaching, where women could work outside the home. She became a prominent member of the growing community of Florissant, serving on the school board and hosting social gatherings in her home. As further evidence of her ambition and energy, it can be noted that by the time she filed the final homestead papers in 1885, she had increased the value of her property nearly five times.

At the age of 66, Hornbek married Frederick Sticksel, a German immigrant who is thought to have worked for her. They spent nearly five years together before Adeline Warfield Harker Hornbek Sticksel died of "paralysis" (probably a stroke) on June 27, 1905. She had demonstrated how a successful living could be earned through wise choices in selecting land and in improving that land with energy and hard work. It is an interesting testimony to Hornbek's independent spirit that her last two husbands moved into her already-established homes. She had enjoyed 27 busy years on her mountain valley ranch.

Although the Homestead Act was not originally intended to help women become a stronger economic force in this country, it did provide some women with land and farms of their own. There were a number of flaws in the Act and it never accomplished all that Congress intended. The Act did not ease overcrowding in the East. In fact, eastern population increased 400 percent between 1870 and 1910. Of homestead lands, only one out of nine acres ended up in the hands of those it was intended to help. The specification of granting land in 160 acre plots was not really useful in the West. Unlike the Midwest where there was sufficient rain and good soil, the West had a dry climate and less abundant and less fertile topsoil. Eking out an existence on 160 acres was very difficult. Many homesteaders failed. Nevertheless, the Homestead Act did act as a powerful force in populating the West, changing the shape and attitudes of our nation, and in some cases empowering women.

1. Under what conditions could individuals claim land under the Homestead Act?

2. How did the Homestead Act create new opportunities for women?

3. What were some of the characteristics of the Florissant Valley that made it a good place to settle?

4. What are some of the hardships Adeline Hornbek faced during her lifetime? How did she appear to handle them?

Reading 1 was compiled from the monument's visitor's guide, the "Homestead Proof-Testimony of Claimant on October 27, 1885," and archives housed at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.

Teaching Activities--Determining the Facts

Reading 2: The Proper Victorian Lady

Founded in 1830, Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine became the most widely read magazine for women. In the 1850s, Godey's circulation reached 150,000, a huge number for the time, and it is almost certain that Adeline Hornbek was among its readers. The magazine preached middle-class values and firmly decreed that a woman's place was in the home creating a clean and wholesome atmosphere for her family. The following excerpt from Godey's "The Editor's Table," January 1860, expresses the important role of the woman in the home as espoused by the magazine:

> There is the wife and mother, the centre of the family, the magnet that draws man to the domestic altar, that makes him a civilized being, a social Christian. The wife is truly the light of the home, and if she will do faithfully the duties God has imposed on her condition, He will bless and sustain her. She is the teacher and inspirer of her children, and angels share or sympathize with her....
>
> It should be woman's part to soften the dark hours of affliction and brighten the happy days of joy. God has gifted her with finer sensibilities and quicker fancy than are needful or suitable to the harder and stronger sex. Women, therefore, step out of their own path when they attempt to encroach on the proper masculine pursuits; and in doing so they lose their own advantages, which are great--for God has been kind to His daughter, the 'last, best work' of creation--and forsake their own duties, which are of paramount importance in society, without being able to perform those belonging to man. They thus become, unhappy beings....
>
> Every woman can, if she sincerely wish it, contribute to make the home in which she lives pleasanter and better for her presence. Let her cultivate what is agreeable and cheerful, as well as exercise the sober duties of her position, and bear in mind that 'the fruit of the Spirit (or piety) is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, temperance.' Then she will be a mighty agent in promoting the best good of society, and may join with angels in the sweet song of peace on earth.
>
> All persons of good sense and right feeling know perfectly well that the true happiness of families is found in their internal resources, and....'the sober certainty of waking bliss must be found at HOME or nowhere.' To promote domestic enjoyment is, therefore, a subject of paramount importance. This has been our cherished object, and in all the variety of literary, artistic, and useful subjects we have set before our readers during the past months of this eventful year, we have aimed to make plain the right manner of life, so that woman may comprehend how best she can enjoy, embellish, and exalt home duties and home pleasures.

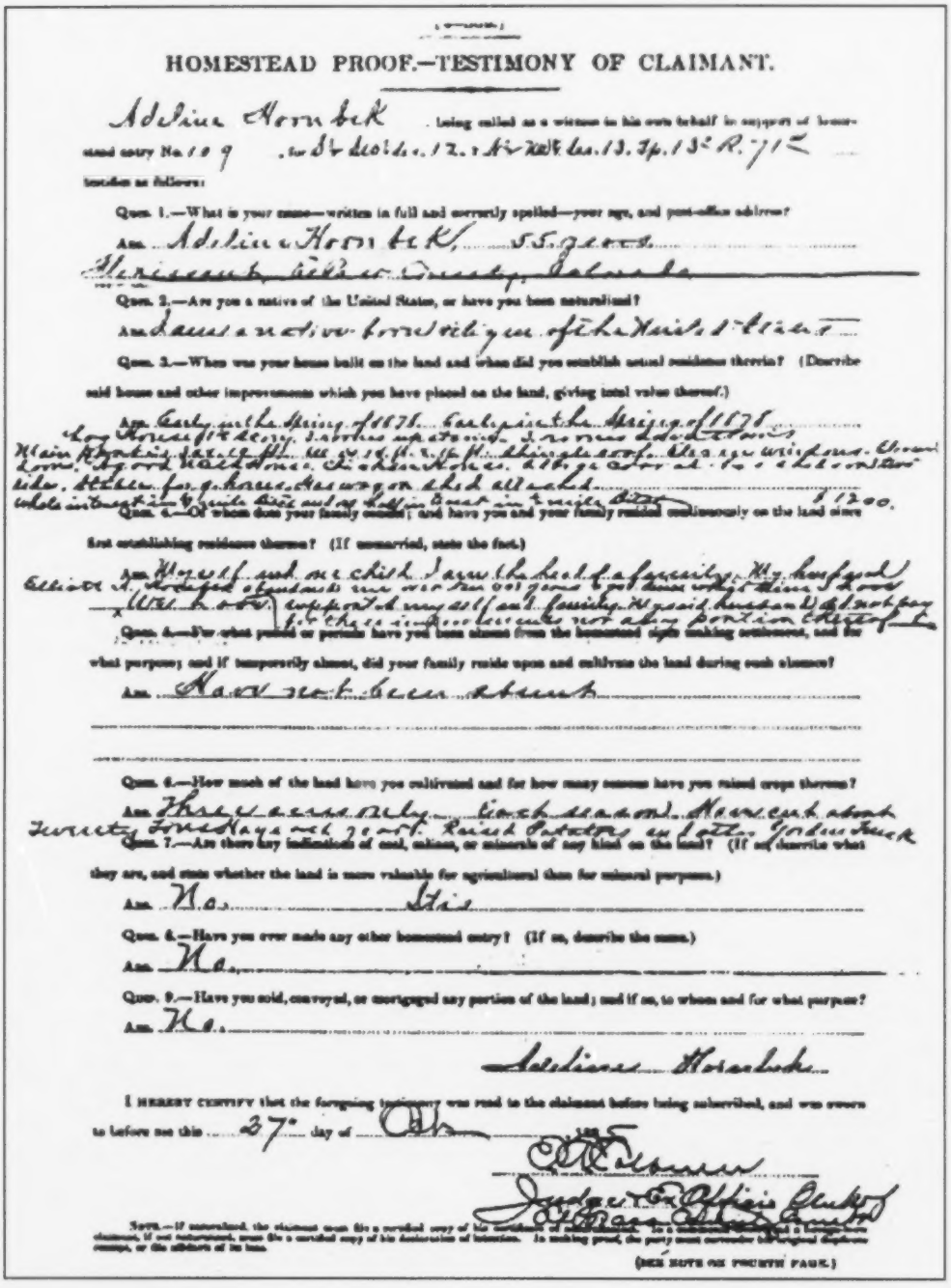
1. Based on your knowledge of Adeline Hornbek, do you think she exemplified the ideal Victorian woman? Why or why not?

2. Would the hard life required as a homesteader ever fit in with the concept of a proper lady as presented in the excerpt? Why or why not? How do you think the reality of frontier life might have impacted this concept of a woman's domestic role?

3. How old was Hornbek when this typical article was published? How do you think it might have affected her ideas and her behavior?

Teaching Activities--Determining the Facts

Reading 3: Homestead Proof. --Testimony of Claimant



HOMESTEAD PROOF.—TESTIMONY OF CLAIMANT.

Adeline Hornbek being called as a witness in his own behalf in support of homestead entry No. 109, for S½ Sec. 12, N½ NW¼ Sec. 13, Tp. 13 S. R. 71 W., testifies as follows:

Ques. 1.—What is your name—written in full and correctly spelled—your age, and post-office address?

Ans. Adeline Hornbek, 55 years. Harrisburg, Weld County, Colorado.

Ques. 2.—Are you a native of the United States, or have you been naturalized?

Ans. I am a native born citizen of the United States.

Ques. 3.—When was your house built on the land and when did you establish actual residence thereon? (Describe said house and other improvements which you have placed on the land, giving total value thereof.)

Ans. Early in the Spring of 1876. Early in the Spring of 1876. Log House 14 x 16 ft. 1 story high. 3 doors and 3 windows. 1 room. Claim shanty 12 x 14 ft. 1 story high. Shingle roof. Used as a dwelling. Good well. Corral. Chicken house. Both of above buildings. Stable for 4 horses. Has wagon and all tools. Total value $1200.

Ques. 4.—Of whom does your family consist, and have you and your family resided continuously on the land since first establishing residence thereon? (If unmarried, state the fact.)

Ans. Myself and one child. I am the head of a family. My husband died about 1 year ago. Left me with 80 acres to get done with. Have lived on land continuously with exception of 3 months in winter of 1877 when I was not able to live on account of sickness. Have lived in Greeley since.

Ques. 5.—For what period or periods have you been absent from the homestead since making settlement, and for what purpose; and if temporarily absent, did your family reside upon and cultivate the land during such absence?

Ans. Have not been absent.

Ques. 6.—How much of the land have you cultivated and for how many seasons have you raised crops thereon?

Ans. Three acres only. Each season. Have cut about 2 acres of hay each year. Raised potatoes on lot. Garden truck.

Ques. 7.—Are there any indications of coal, silver, or minerals of any kind on the land? (If so, describe what they are, and state whether the land is more valuable for agricultural than for mineral purposes.)

Ans. No. This is

Ques. 8.—Have you ever made any other homestead entry? (If so, describe the same.)

Ans. No.

Ques. 9.—Have you sold, conveyed, or mortgaged any portion of the land; and if so, to whom and for what purpose?

Ans. No.

Adeline Hornbek

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing testimony was read to the claimant before being subscribed, and was sworn to before me this 27th day of Oct. 1885.

C. E. Thomas

Judge or Clerk of District Court.

NOTE.—If naturalized, the claimant must file a certified copy of the certificate of naturalization. If a native citizen, he must make an affidavit to that effect. If not naturalized, must file a certified copy of the declaration of intention. In making proof, the party must corroborate the original declaration, or the affidavit of his witness.

(SEE NOTE ON FOURTH PAGE.)

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HOMESTEAD PROOF.—TESTIMONY OF CLAIMANT.

Adeline Hornbek ..... being called as a witness in his own behalf in support of homestead entry No. 1.0.9 ....., for S½ NE¼ Sec. 12. & N½ NW¼ Sec. 13. Tp. 13 S. R. 71 W ..... testifies as follows:

Ques. 1.—What is your name—written in full and correctly spelled—your age, and post-office address?

Ans. Adeline Hornbek, 55 years.

Merrimount, Weld County, Colorado

Ques. 2.—Are you a native of the United States, or have you been naturalized?

Ans. I am a native born citizen of the United States

Ques. 3.—When was your house built on the land and when did you establish actual residence therein? (Describe said house and other improvements which you have placed on the land, giving total value thereof.)

Ans. Early in the Spring of 1876. Early in the Spring of 1876

Log House 14 x 16 ft. 8 rooms upstairs. 3 rooms downstairs

Main Portion 24 x 32 ft. All of it. Shingle roof. Glass sash windows. Floors

down. Board walls. Good Walls. Kitchen Floors. All the above material. Two

sides, studded for 9 rooms. Has wagon shed attached

Whole interest in ¼ mile Ditch and one Half interest in ½ mile Ditch $1200.

Ques. 4.—Of whom does your family consist; and have you and your family resided continuously on the land since first establishing residence thereon? (If unmarried, state the fact.)

Ans. Myself and one child I am the head of a family. My husband

Elliott A. Hornbek abandoned me over ten (10) years ago and since I have

lived in Colo. I have supported myself and family. My said husband did not pay

for the necessaries for the family

Ques. 5.—For what period or periods have you been absent from the homestead since making settlement, and for what purpose; and if temporarily absent, did your family reside upon and cultivate the land during such absence?

Ans. Have not been absent

Ques. 6.—How much of the land have you cultivated and for how many seasons have you raised crops thereon?

Ans. Three acres only. Each season. Have cultivated about

Twenty Tons Hay each year. Raised Potatoes and Some Garden Truck

Ques. 7.—Are there any indications of coal, salines, or minerals of any kind on the land? (If so, describe what they are, and state whether the land is more valuable for agricultural than for mineral purposes.)

Ans. No. Is

Ques. 8.—Have you ever made any other homestead entry? (If so, describe the same.)

Ans. No.

Ques. 9.—Have you sold, conveyed, or mortgaged any portion of the land; and if so, to whom and for what purpose?

Ans. No.

Adeline Hornbek

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing testimony was read to the claimant before being subscribed, and was sworn to before me this 27th day of Oct. 1885

Judge of Co. Court Weld Co. Colo.

NOTE.—If naturalized, the claimant must file a certified copy of his certificate of naturalization. If a commercial traveler, or a foreign-born claimant, if not naturalized, must file a certified copy of his declaration of intention. In making proof, the party must surrender his original duplicate receipt, or file affidavit of its loss.

(SEE NOTE ON FOURTH PAGE.)

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Adeline Hornbek's answers to some of the questions on the Testimony of Claimant are difficult to read. Try to decipher as much as you can before referring to the partial transcript.

1. What is the purpose of this form?

2. What can you learn about Hornbek's house and other improvements?

3. Why might Hornbek have insisted on explaining that her husband abandoned her and her family?

4. Why do you think Hornbek cultivated such a small portion of the homestead land?

5. In what year did Hornbek prove up on her land?

Partial Transcript of Homestead Proof.--Testimony of Claimant.

Answer (Question 1): Adeline Hornbek, 55 years. Florissant, El Paso County, Colorado

Answer (Question 2): I am a native born citizen of the United States.

Answer (Question 3): Early in the Spring of 1878. Early in the Spring of 1878. Log House 1 ½ story, 3 rooms upstairs--3 rooms downstairs. Main part is 30 x 19 ft. Ell is 14 ft. x 16 ft. Shingle roof. Eleven windows. Elevendoors. A good Milk House, Chicken House. A large corral has a shed on two sides. Stables for 9 horses, has wagon shed attached. Whole interest in1/4 mile Ditch and one half interest in ½ mile Ditch. $1200.

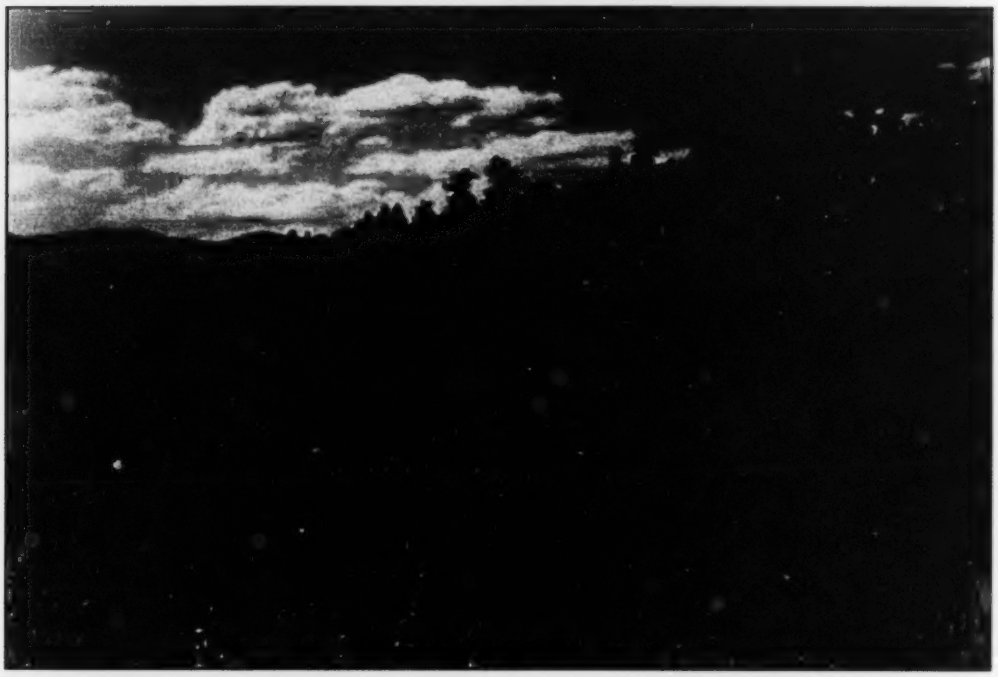
Answer (Question 4): Myself and one child. I am the head of a family. My husband Elliott A. Hornbek abandoned me over ten (10) years ago, since which time I have supported myself and family. My said husband did not pay for these improvements nor any portion thereof--.

Answer (Question 5): Have not been absent

Answer (Question 6): Three acres only. Each season Have cut about twenty tons hay each year. Raised Potatoes and other garden (illegible).

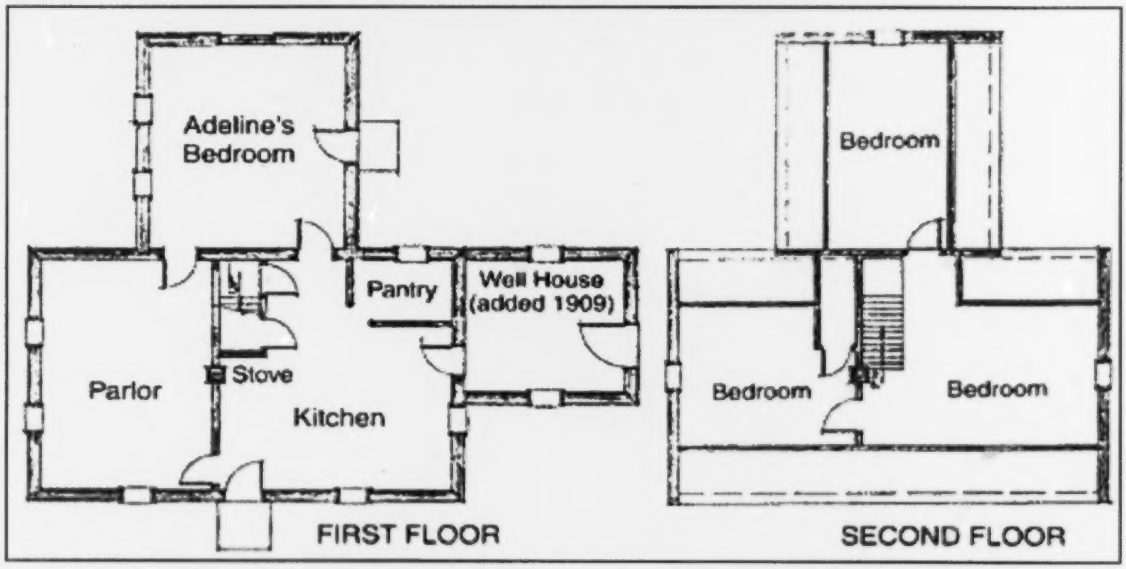
Teaching Activities--Visual Evidence

Photo 1: The Hornbek Homestead.



(Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument)

Drawing 1: Floor plan of Adeline Hornbek's House.



(Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument)

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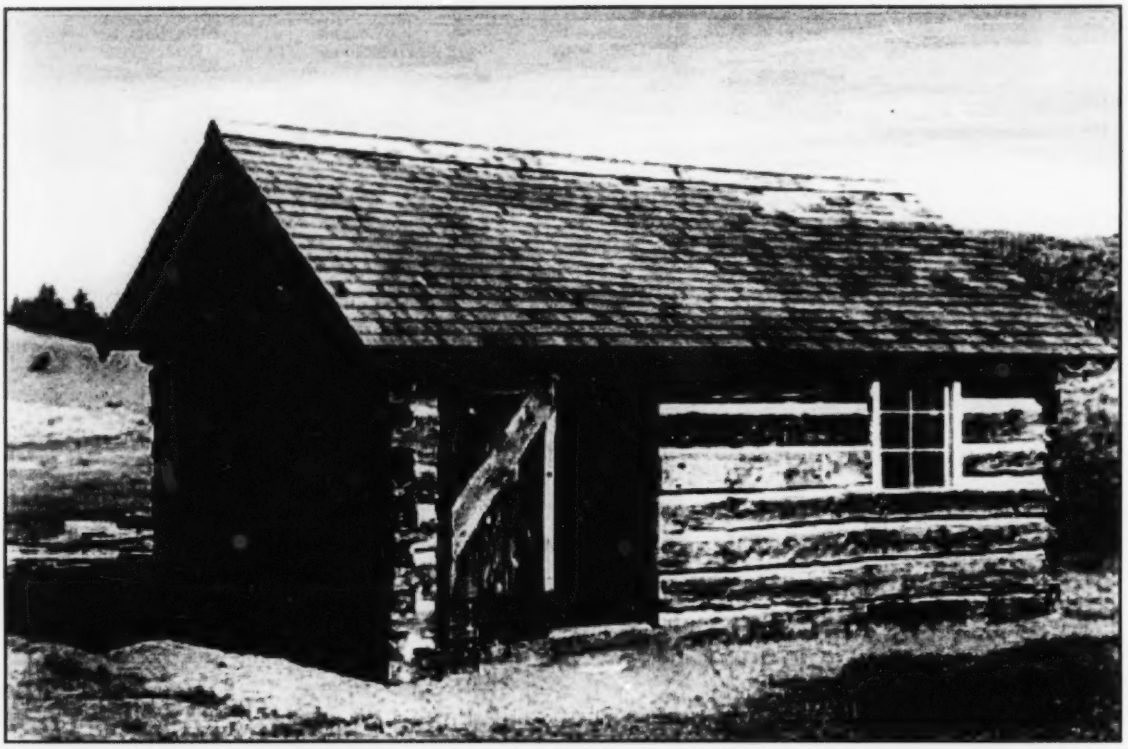
1. What are your impressions of the landscape?

2. How do the photo and floor plan compare to your image of the homestead based on descriptions in the readings?

3. Why was Hornbek's house considered unusual for the time period and location?

Teaching Activities--Visual Evidence

Photo 2: Representative Barn on Hornbek Homestead.



(Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument)

The National Park Service has moved buildings from nearby sites to represent some of the original outbuildings on Hornbek's homestead which no longer remain. The building in this photo, which was constructed in 1890, was the home of the Del Johnson family for many years and is typical of homestead houses of that time. When they became better established, the family converted their original homestead house into a barn. The building was moved to its present location to represent Hornbek's chicken and small livestock barn. This structure is small enough to fit in the downstairs bedroom of the Hornbek house.

1. How does the Johnson cabin compare to the Hornbek house in size and design?

2. What does this indicate about Hornbek's financial status when she came to the Florissant area?

3. What does this indicate about the lifestyle of the typical homesteader? Keep in mind that this house was built over a decade after Adeline Hornbek settled in the area.

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Putting It All Together

The following activities will help students better understand the impact of the Homestead Act on this country's development. Students also will have the opportunity to learn about the contributions of important women in their community's history.

Activity 1: Homesteading

Divide students into groups of three or four and have each group research one state west of the Mississippi to determine in what ways the Homestead Act succeeded or failed there. Ask a spokesperson to summarize each group's findings for the class. Then hold a general class discussion emphasizing the similarities and differences of homesteading in the several states studied.

Activity 2: Homesteading in the Local Region

Ask students to define "Manifest Destiny" in their own words. Next, have them conduct research to determine what role, if any, Manifest Destiny and/or the Homestead Act played in the settlement of their community or region. Ask students to submit a short paper describing their findings.

Activity 3: Researching Important Women in Your Community's History

Have students work in small groups to prepare an exhibit that features an outstanding woman who lived (or lives) in their community. They should consider ways in which the woman exemplified or contradicted the prevailing social attitudes of the time. The exhibits should include pictures of the person, the places that represent her life, and sketches or examples of the activities that made this woman an important member of the local society. If possible, arrange for the exhibits to be displayed for other students in the school.